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AN ANALYSIS OF THE GOOD.

IT is obvious, yet it must be premised, that the nature of the good does not rest in the mere things which are so described, but in the mental activity which seizes on them to feed itself. Thus the good is always an experiential aspect of things : that which in any wise satisfies or dissatisfies we call the generic good (equal to the good-bad).¹ In the generic good we see the experience as reaching beyond itself or reacting upon itself, that is, experience as consciously progressive or retrogressive. Yet in making the good experiential and subjective we do not imply that a thing is good because we desire it, rather that we desire it because it is good. It is not until the thing is appreciated as good that it can be desired, and this appreciation has often to be cultivated. If we desire to appreciate a so-called good, *e.g.*, a noted painting, we may at length appreciate its goodness and so really desire it therefor. We are not capable of desiring a thing till we set a value on it. The savage does not desire a five-dollar bill until he learns that it will buy something that seems to him good, as tobacco.

Whence, now, arises the good as a self-evident factor in experience? Psychologically, we must seek the origin of the good in the bad; that is, the basis of our organic pleasures is the painful ancestral strenuousness whereby our pleasure-yielding organs were built up. By the most severely painful, effortful, tastings by unnumbered generations of ancestors, the taste-organs have been formed so that I now by my tongue, without effort, taste many things as 'good.' The psychic history of the good, as mental satisfaction, is that all pleasure is the fruit of pain, that the immediately bad, as effort-pain, is the seed of the ultimate good. Even common-sense points in this direction when it sees that 'goods' are the creation of toil. A good

¹ We, however, do not use the term in this generic sense, unless definitely so stated, but in the sense of the good as opposed to, or correlative of, the bad.

always costs ; and it is evident to all that the highest and most ideal goods of art, morality, science, and religion are the offspring of exceptional natures at exceptional moments of painfully intense and costly creative activity, and that these goods are appreciated only by painful endeavor. This is not to deny that the highest efforts of experience may have some immediate return in a 'feeling good,' a self-satisfaction and self-approbation in work for its own sake ; yet obviously this is rather late in the history of experience.

But the good is not only based subjectively on evil, it exists by doing objective evil : it bears an evil to the being yielding the good. Steak is good for me, but it is bad for the ox that I eat it. I have done harm to the tree in order that I may have a chair and a bed. 'The good of all life,' and 'universal good,' are inconsistent expressions ; for life is always cannibal. As for human civilization, it is the systematic and scientific robbery and enslavement of plants and animals. The seeds and substance of plants, as grains and fruits, the produce and substance of animals, as eggs and flesh, we divert from the natural and legitimate good of the plant and animal to our own good. The Buddhist, almost alone, shows a compunction for the animal. To get a good, we wrest the good-yielder out of its natural course. All nature, in being made to minister to us, in supplying us with goods, incurs a loss and an evil. We know not, but it may in some wise be a hurt that the elements and forces are subdued by man. The good, then, as service is so much loss to the servant.

We see, then, the evil that the good does, that it has an evil side, that good to any being means bad to the being that yields the good. This may not be entirely general, and, under late conditions, an order may have in some cases grown up so that the yielder of the good is alike blessed with the receiver, *e.g.*, nursing mother and child ; yet, originally at least, the good given is a sacrifice, and in most cases remains so. But further the bad nature of the good is also exemplified in this, that the good has always a better. As a matter of experience, no matter how good we feel, we can conceive ourselves better off, and hence so far we may feel bad. The good is never the best, nor the

bad the worst : hence from one side all is bad (pessimism), from the other, all is good (optimism).

On a general view it is plain that, in any system of finite beings interacting and absorbing each other, good and bad will be according as the individual's experience is built up by the service of others, or as it merely serves the good of others, and so is pressed out of life by others. Nature is a system of getting all you can — the good — as cheap as you can — with the least pain or evil ; and this getting is the essence of its being and life. That which the finite individual can take and wrest from others for its own realization and satisfaction, is to it the good, and the strife for this is its struggle for existence.

The good is then doubly finite, in that it is a finite to a finite : we both eat the cake and get tired of it. If we could eat our cake and have it too, with never a palling on the taste, the good would be greatly bettered, but not perfected ; for dependence on the external would imply limitation and delay, and so be felt as evil. As a matter of actual experience, however, we know the good disappears in the using, and it is an evil that the good disappears in being good. A box of sweetmeats, or a concert, passes away in the process of being good, and for a very large class of goods it is true that they perish in the using. A good unrealized is so far bad, and yet in realizing it we have the evil of continually losing it. Thus the actual and the potential good are both bad.

The great evil of this doubly finite good has led to a search for a better good, or even a perfect good, a good which shall not hurt the giver and be lasting in its substance and activity. To this end, the real and best good has been placed not in material goods, but in spiritual or subjective, in aesthetic, moral, and intellectual delights. But even these have material conditions, which are essential and, in many cases, very expensive. And the good here also is what is provided for me by the painstaking of another. The condition of its appreciation is also long ancestral training. While the good is here more stable than in some forms, it is yet passing. And the evil of the mutual exclusiveness of the finite is seen here also in that

my good is my experience which thereby and therein belongs to no one else.

If we now take up such a high element as truth, we shall see how the good-bad is related even to it. Truth is either agreement of ideal with real, or of real with ideal, as I think the house is white, and then find this true, or having the ideal of straight, I find the side of the house straight or true. Our ideal realized or real idealized is both true and good ; the agreement is agreeable. Even the bad coming true is so far good. It is not that the truth is unpleasant, but that the unpleasant is true. There is then a goodness in all truth. We might say that the truth of goodness is the goodness of the true, its intrinsic satisfactoriness. Certainly those who set up the true as the highest element merely assert its goodness as more essential and vital than all other forms. Truth is then a kind of goodness, and goodness, as agreement to an end, a kind of truth. And the truer the better. To say the table is colored is true, and in so far good ; but to say that the table is red is truer, and had better be said ; but that the table is dark red is truest and therefore the best statement. The agreeability of truth lies originally in the fact that adaptation and adjustment are the nature of life, and the good is manifested thereby. Life is primarily a search for truth because of the goodness it yields ; and, finally, by association truth for truth's sake becomes a good in itself.

If the true is of itself good, it is irrational to question the truth of goodness, and a general pessimism is unreasonable. Pessimism cannot deny the satisfaction which we take in the appreciation of its truth, and so is itself a good. To say that all goodness is really badness, is then self-contradictory ; for there is an element of goodness in the mere statement as a truth, which destroys its truthfulness. And an absolute optimism is as irrational as an absolute pessimism. For if badness is merely goodness in masquerade, is it not bad for the good thus to disguise itself, make itself untrue, and deceive me ?

It is evident thus far that the good as an element of experience is imperfect and unsatisfactory, and hardly to be classed as

a real good. The good is not then, it may be said, a means to experience, but experience is a means to the good. A metempirical good is the only true good ; and our life should exist for ends beyond itself, — for the right, the true, the holy, as real goods. But these goods are surely empirical in that they are cognized, are felt about, are appreciated, and awaken admiration and satisfaction ; and so we do not rid ourselves of the function of the good in experience. The good is always something toward which experience sets itself, and in which it finds a satisfaction ; it is the very centre of experience in cognition, feeling, and will. That which transcends experience, and cannot appeal to it, does not deserve the name ‘good.’ We cannot set aside the empirical problem by transferring the term good to a metempirical result, viz., the function of experience in reality, which is a bare unknowable. If we use the term good to denote a something beyond experience, which experience cannot know or feel, but to which experience tends, we are simply calling an unknowable a knowable, and so eliminating all meaning.

To be sure, man has always viewed with approval a transcendence which turned toward his own experience. The world of nature — elements, plants, and animals — does not have its worth in itself, but its good is transcendent, it exists for man. Primitive man in his naïve selfishness believes that the clouds rain, the sun heats, plants vegetate, and animals reproduce for him. Even the deities exist merely as providers for man. We say then that a good transcendent to experience, whatever that may mean, obviously does not explain the nature of the good in experience. In a sense all good is transcendent, that is, all goods are good, not in themselves, but in what they are good for. They are good in transcendence alone, as being utilized by some higher agency. A theological transcendence would claim that man himself is good only as, in some parallel way, being utilized to the good of some higher and supreme being or beings.

Again, in human society the good is interpreted transcendently, the man being good as he is serviceable or ‘good’ to the

tribe, the nation, or the world at large. But this social transcendence may be viewed as only an appearance. While the primitive instinct of life is to work immediately for its own good without respect to the good of any others, yet gradually the organism is forced to learn the advantage of realizing his good mediately, that is, by doing good, by exchange of service. Social differentiation is based, explicitly or implicitly, upon the principle : 'You individuals do all these things for me, and I will do this thing for all of you.' Association has certainly been favored by natural selection as a mode of individual advantage. Formally this socialism is altruism, but really it is organized egoism. In a complete and perfect socialism and altruism, no one would ever act for himself, but his whole activity and thought would be for others, and he would be entirely dependent. But while in society the individual's function is necessarily objective, yet, society being a method of securing mutual individual welfare, this function reacts upon the actor. If every one ministers, every one is ministered unto ; if I do my special part in seeking the good of all, I know that all are seeking my good in all kinds.

We see, then, that while morality as social sanction is transcendent, in emphasizing the objective good, the transcendence or altruism in the social organism is not real but mere appearance. Since society is an organism, what one is good for is what is good for him. What the heart is good for (pumping) is good for it and makes it, and what injures the heart injures the whole body. Where disease requires the excision or mutilation of some organ, the whole suffers, and so much extra work is thrown on other parts. So, in the social organism, a member's own real good is identical with his doing good. A telegraph operator who is required to forego his dinner in order to look out for a late train does, indeed, lose somewhat of his own good, but in the cause of his own greater good as a part of a railway organism in whose derangement he is necessarily involved. If he did not do his part, he would be dismissed and lose the benefits of the society of which he is a member. Again, I am fond of music, but find it apt to interfere with my

work, with my efficiency as a member of society in the form of activity I am best fitted for, and therefore I deny myself not only for others' good but for my own, in so far as I find music weakening to my highest and most satisfactory activities.

So we see that the organic nature of society makes real self-sacrifice impossible as a good. What is an evil to the member must be an evil to the whole. The self which really sacrifices itself, really hurts itself, so far impairs its value in the social organism. To be sure you say, "It is good of you," when I, although thirsty, offer you my only orange, and, if I am very thirsty, you pronounce it very good of me. That is, the measure of real self-sacrifice is the measure of the moral good. But this scheme is really irrational and imperfect. I should have provided two oranges, one for each of us, and so have prevented all suffering. My fault in not doing so is punished by my deprivation of the single orange, or I may in some measure expiate it by self-deprivation. The self-sacrifice is real, but it is an evil, since my hurt involves the whole, and is, in particular, disquieting to my companion. I can only be good to others so far as I have good in myself. We behold, indeed, a vast deal of altruism which ignores this point of view, and many selves who insist upon a sacrifice of their shallowness and nothingness, which is wanted by no one, — busybodies who, ignorantly and fanatically trying to give themselves to well-doing, bring about confusion and discontent. Out of the riches of a true and deep personality alone comes the real good, that fruitfulness which benefits both giver and receiver. The tree which hurts itself in bearing fruit is a bad tree. We say, indeed, that the sacrifice of the present to the future is good; but yet, since the future is made by the present, sacrifice, as real evil, must so far harm.

If my real good is identical with the good, why should not I, in seeking my own good and happiness, find it? The paradox, that as matter of fact we do not gain our own good by seeking it, that pure egoism is unsuccessful, that only by objective endeavor is the individual good realized, is no puzzle when we reflect on the organic nature of society. It is the nature of

the organ as such to fulfil itself only in service to the whole, that is, in objective action ; and so far as it fails in this and acts for itself, it injures its efficiency, and the whole, with the organ itself, is impaired. The self-centred thought and feeling make the member of society just so much less efficient, and distract him from his work in the social organism, and thus impede the whole, which reacts on him. The selfish do not realize their full good simply because they thereby do not fulfil their whole function, and thus cause loss both to society and to themselves as members thereof. Lack of objectivity is the chief disease of the social organism, and continually threatens its dissolution. The good of the individual is certainly implicit in the social organism. Yet when the individual makes this explicit, and aims at it, by the very nature of organism, as all acting for each and each for all, there is hindrance and loss. Even where each does only so much good as will bring him a full return (justice), the organism of society is imperfect, and works but rigidly and slowly, because calculation and dispensing of justice is such a perplexing, slow, and disputatious affair. The perfect social organism implies a complete self-forgetfulness, a perfect objective endeavor, in all its members ; for only thus is specialization of function carried out perfectly. In an ideally complete organization, each member is entirely absorbed in serving the whole in some minute special way, and is served in most manifold special ways by all the other members.

Differentiation of function is always a decrease in self-service and an increase in the service of others. Thus, if differentiation were carried to its ideal limit, the individual member would do absolutely nothing for himself and would have no selfish thought whatsoever, everything being fully accomplished for him. The complexity of recent society, and the large measure of its interdependence, already illustrate this in some measure. The ideal human society is thus, from the scientific point of view, that form in which love is dominant, where each acts with a sincere and pure devotion for all, and all for each. Judged by this standard, human society is a very imperfect organism, and yet even now those who most devotedly specialize for the good of

all have as a rule their own good most fully realized. Everything is fully and lovingly done by society for those who forget their own interests in their absorbing special task, which lies in the line of general benefaction. In the perfect human society there is no place for "reasonable self-love"; this is only an expedient (perhaps a necessary expedient), with most persons, in imperfect social conditions. But from the completely rational, organic point of view it is irrational to look out for oneself at all, self-interest being wholly conserved objectively in the perfect organism.

Ethics as altruistic, that is, as emphasizing the outward activity, is thus unconsciously founded in reason; it instinctively attains to the rational end—perfectness of coöperation in attaining the individual good. A good man is one who goes about, not getting good, immediately or mediately, but doing good for its own sake. In the order of evolution, objective good arose merely as means to the subjective, *i.e.*, as mediate; but in pure ethics it becomes an end in itself, just as, in pure science, knowledge becomes an end in itself. This erection of what arose as mere means in the struggle for existence to ends in themselves, is the most significant fact in human evolution. But though reason sees the organic need of altruism, yet it also sees that in this altruism, since I am another to all others, my good is as real as any. The perfection of organism is humanity self-consciously organized for the development of experience. In this alone will human good be fully realized.

And we may take a larger organic view than the merely human (but one which includes it), *viz.*, an organism which is in some wise working out the individual good of its several factors, of which humanity is but one. In speaking thus of the good of the human good—that which this element of human experience is really good for, and in whose good it realizes its own good—we enter upon a very interesting organic conception. We certainly have no reason for supposing that the organic nature of reality culminates in human experience; we must rather suppose that man's life enters organically into some larger whole, for which it performs some needed function.

But this Being wherein man is an organ must itself be finite, and ministrant in a larger organism, and so on *ad infinitum*. This is because organism is a method of securing good, which is finite, for finite beings. We cannot make the whole an organism; for how can that which is absolute need an organic development to secure its good? Organism seems to be a wholly finite mode by which finite beings mutually secure their good, which is objective. But there is nothing objective to the Whole, and therefore for it there is no such good. There can never be an infinite Good or a good Infinite. The good, as the desirable, cannot be the infinite; for then the infinite would be an object. Only the finite can be desired; and desire is never finally satisfied, but is ever born anew, since finitude is practically endless. The infinite, as neither a something nor a somebody, cannot be a good or good: in its absolute self-consistence neither good nor evil can exist, since they exist only in the experience of one finite being in its relations to other finite beings.

This is not to deny that worth may determine being, that only that which is worth being, is. That is, in the realm of finite individuals all is functional, and thereby determined. The whole of things is organific, and only that which subserves is actual. Only as, consciously or unconsciously, maintaining relations and holding its own by specific energy, does anything become actual and exist. Thus, in a large sense, because a thing is good for something, it reaches its own being and good. But just because worth is the actuating principle of the finite, it is itself finite as end and object.

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